

ENGLAND'S TREASURE-ISLAND IN THE WEST.

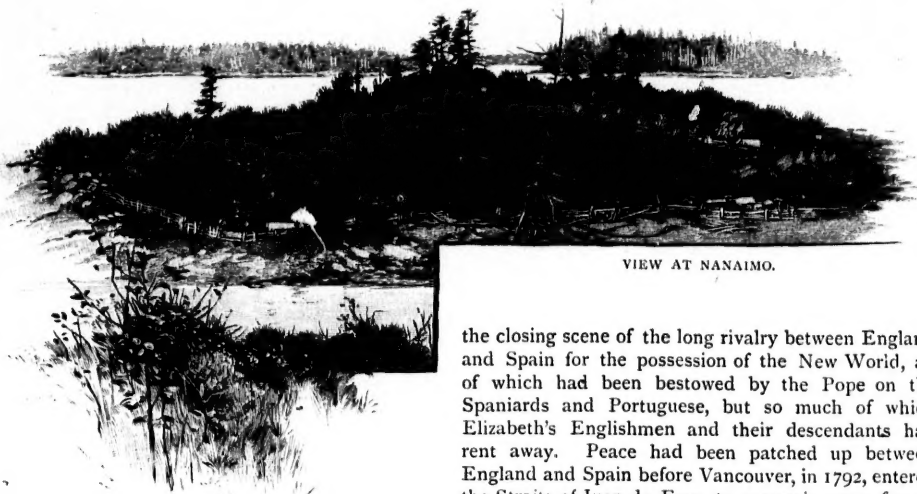


OLD EASTON—FORMERLY BELONGING TO THE HUDSON BAY COMPANY.

Pacific, he had sailed on an expedition past California and up the western coasts of America to the

It is nearly three hundred years since an English merchant at Venice met Juan de Fuca, an old Greek pilot, who had been in the service of Spain, and who, if his story were true, had done great things for his employers; for he said that, after the scare given to the Spaniards by the appearance of Francis Drake in the

northward, to see whether any North-West Passage from the Atlantic did really exist, and, if so, what measures could be taken to prevent the English from coming through it. He said, further, that in the latitude of 47° he had found the entrance to such a passage, and sailed in it for many days, describing the strait, and giving reasons for his certainty that it would be found to reach from one ocean to the other. Such a passage, corresponding to the Strait of Magellan at the other end of the Western Continent, was exactly what the English of that day were constantly hoping, though repeatedly failing, to find; and Lock, the English merchant, lost no time in laying Juan's offer to show them the way before Sir Walter Raleigh and other leading spirits of that adventurous age. But whether it was that they thought the old pilot's undertaking to make the whole passage in thirty days a little too confident, as undoubtedly it was, or for some other reason, his services were not accepted by the English; and, while Juan died in obscurity, his story met the fate of many better stories, and was disbelieved long before it had been disproved, just as Baffin's discovery of Baffin's Bay was for two centuries regarded by every one as a fiction merely



VIEW AT NANAIMO.

because none had proved it to be a fact. Nevertheless, at the present day the channel parting Vancouver's Island from the mainland of Oregon is called by the name of Juan de Fuca's Straits, and it corresponds well enough, both in latitude and in appearance, with the ancient mariner's description to make it probable that, if his theories were wrong, his facts were not far from right.

It was a navigator more famous than Juan de Fuca, the great Captain Cook, who in 1778 made what may be called the first discovery of Vancouver's Island, though he did not guess it to be an island, much less call it by the name of Vancouver, who was then only one of the officers in his company. Cook saw the entrance to the strait, but did not enter it, for he did not believe in Juan de Fuca, knowing that the American continent reached much further to the north than the sanguine Elizabethans had supposed; besides, his instructions were to search for the North-West Passage in latitudes far more northerly than the Spaniards had attained. But on his way northward Cook halted at Nootka Sound, on the western coast of the island, where he landed and made friends, according to his wont, with the natives, and claimed the land for the English King. The Ahts, as these natives of Vancouver's Island are called, knew the English henceforth as "King George men."

The Ahts had not long to wait before making the acquaintance of other European nations, and discovering, perhaps, that civilised men do not always set an example of peaceable living to savages. Ten years had hardly passed before the destruction of a small English settlement at Nootka Sound by the Spaniards had nearly set the two nations by the ears: but diplomacy was equal to the occasion, and the great European war was delayed for a few years. The affair of Nootka Sound is, however, interesting as

the closing scene of the long rivalry between England and Spain for the possession of the New World, all of which had been bestowed by the Pope on the Spaniards and Portuguese, but so much of which Elizabeth's Englishmen and their descendants had rent away. Peace had been patched up between England and Spain before Vancouver, in 1792, entered the Straits of Juan de Fuca, to ascertain once for all how far they could be followed, and if by them a passage might really be found to the other side of the continent where the English had already made homes. He found no such passage, but, after exploring every nook in the winding channels around him, he came back to the Pacific by a narrow strait to the north, and proved that this, the most westerly of our American settlements, was an island.

Vancouver's Island, with the desolate waters of the North Pacific before it, and the "great lone land" of North America, then uncrossed by any highway, at its back, was then, and for a long time, about as remote from England as any spot on the earth's surface could be; and the little settlement of Victoria, made there by the Hudson's Bay Company about forty-five years ago, could not have been reached from this country without a journey of many weeks. But a little later began those wonderful discoveries of gold which drew men in crowds from the old lands of Europe to waste places which had hitherto hardly known the print of the white man's foot, to California and New South Wales, to New Zealand, and in time to the gold-fields of the furthest west, in British Columbia. It was as a halfway house between the older El Dorado of California and the newer of British Columbia that Victoria, the capital of Vancouver's Island, came to expand into a town.

All this is now changed. To reach Vancouver's Island it is still necessary to travel 6,000 miles, but it is not necessary to take much more than a fortnight on the journey, nor to pass over any tract of water or land which is not ruled by Britannia or Britannia's Queen. The Canadian Pacific Railway now runs across the whole continent, past the rough plains north of Lake Superior, past the grassy plains of Manitoba, past the gorges of the Rocky Mountains, and the other ranges which rise in the beautiful province of British Columbia, to the shores of the Pacific itself.

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Vancouver's Island, being not much less than 300 miles long from north-west to south-east, and over 50 miles broad at the widest part, contains a great deal of land, of which, though explorations in the interior have been made, much yet remains unknown. Most of the country is mountainous, the highest summits having, it is said, an elevation of over 6,000 feet, or half as much again as the highest mountains in Scotland. The shores abound in beautiful bays, and among the mountains lie numerous lakes, while upon their sides are dense forests, giving shelter to many wild animals which no cultivation has as yet disturbed. There are bears and wolves, such as existed once upon a time in merry England, and also panthers or pumas, such as England never possessed even in her merriest days, and deer of several kinds, including that most stately animal the wapiti, to which even the English stag cannot be compared for beauty. And here, too, live several tribes of Indians, once the lords of the soil, which "the high chief of the King George men," "seeing that they did not work it," ordered them to sell. The Ahts were a very backward race of men, who, though bold sailors and skilful hunters, did not know how to work metals, or to grow corn, or to improve their country, much less to defend it. Their strange customs and beliefs have been described and discussed at length; these they will now probably lose, but there seems little hope they will acquire any of a higher character in their place. No such acts of brutality as are recorded of the white settlers in Tasmania have apparently been committed by the settlers of Vancouver's Island upon the Ahts; yet such of these as have mixed with the white man seem

to have learnt from him nothing but some of his worst vices; nor have they, any more than the native Australians, any cause to bless the day when their lonely home was betrayed to the eyes of covetous Europe.

The country which has so long sheltered these fortunate animals and less fortunate men will, it is believed, afford the best of homes to English settlers. The Pacific shores of North America have a climate very unlike the scorching summer and Arctic winter of Eastern Canada, a climate far more nearly resembling that in which the English race has grown up to its present development at home. The weather of Vancouver's Island is described as resembling that of the South of England, but with a larger percentage of bright sunshine than English meteorologists are accustomed to record, save in exceptional seasons like last year's summer. On the other hand, fogs are common enough to remind the patriotic Briton frequently of his original home, while snow puts in an appearance seasonably every winter, though in the lower and warmer parts of the island it seldom lies.

The agricultural resources of Vancouver's Island are as yet but little developed; some parts of the country are indeed already cultivated to great advantage, as others doubtless will be before long; but much of it, in the opinion of those who should know, will never repay the labour of clearing. Meanwhile, the forests supply timber in plenty, and will do so for many years to come. The mineral resources are supposed to be very great, and in one important direction they have been developed already. A little railway runs from Victoria for about 70 miles to



COAL-MINE AT NANAIMO.

Nanaimo, where coal-mines, said to be "inexhaustible in extent," are being worked with very great success. Since coal is conspicuous by its absence from the Pacific shores of North America, its presence at Nanaimo in great, if not inexhaustible, abundance, confers an important distinction upon Vancouver's Island, which is very likely destined to become one of the chief commercial centres in its part of the world. The railroad from Nanaimo conveys the coal to the magnificent harbour of Esquimalt, two or three miles west of Victoria, the praises of which have been sung by almost every one who has seen it, and for which every one who is at all given to prophecy predicts a most brilliant future. Hitherto, indeed, the somewhat scanty traditions of Esquimalt have not been altogether glorious; the port seems to have first come into existence as a refuge for the ships and a hospital for the sailors of the British fleet which failed rather disgracefully in an attack made, with the aid of the French, on the town of Petropaulovski, in Kamschatka, during the Crimean war. But now fortifications are to be raised, and Esquimalt, which is large enough to hold a navy, made into a stronghold suited to the Power which has interests to protect in every sea, even in the North Pacific. The Pacific Ocean is, indeed, so large that one is tempted to doubt whether even Esquimalt will be able, as enthusiasts seem to suppose, to "dominate" the whole of it; and when one finds such an enthusiast pointing out that it is "but three weeks' steam from Sydney," one cannot help reflecting that, after all, this is three times as far as from Liverpool to New York, places which are not yet considered quite as neighbouring towns. However, there can be no doubt of Esquimalt's importance. Seeing that in no very distant future it is possible that much of the trade between East and West, between China and Europe, may pass through Vancouver's Island.

Esquimalt, it is needless to say, is not an English,

but an Indian word; and it is to be hoped that as fresh settlements are made in the island they will be called as much as possible by their old Indian names, of which there should be plenty, since we are told that with the Ahts "every bend has a name, every hill a story, and every dark pool a tradition." We have Victorias enough in different parts of the world, and do not need any more Portlands and Newcastle, still less Smithtons and Jacksonvilles. And it is even easier to appropriate the names of the land than to appropriate the land itself.

There is one product of China which has already come to Vancouver's Island without waiting for the opening up of a trade-route, and that is the Chinaman himself. In Victoria a very considerable proportion of the (as yet) small population is Chinese; and this may become a serious matter, for, useful as the Chinese workman can make himself, his presence among Europeans cannot be regarded as an unmixed blessing, at any rate by European workmen. The question of Chinese labour, however, is one which affects British North America no more than Australia and America generally.

Should the Canadian Pacific Railway fulfil the hopes of its promoters, Vancouver's Island must become an important halting-place on one of the greatest highways in the world. Steamers from Yokohama can run to Esquimalt as easily as to San Francisco, and Esquimalt has the immense advantage of a vast supply of the best coal in its immediate neighbourhood. It is true that a country might be so situated as to attract a large trade, without being otherwise an attractive place to live in. But Vancouver's Island, as has been said, possesses a fine climate, delightful scenery, a large if not unlimited extent of fertile soil, and invaluable mineral treasures. There is, perhaps, no place in England's Empire more likely, so far as we can see, to provide a healthy life and a happy home for emigrant Englishmen.



VICTORIA, VANCOUVER.